

A
RESOLUTION
OF A SEASONABLE

Case of Conscience

BEING PART OF A LETTER TO
A PERSON OF QUALITY
By a Son of the Church of
ENGLAND:



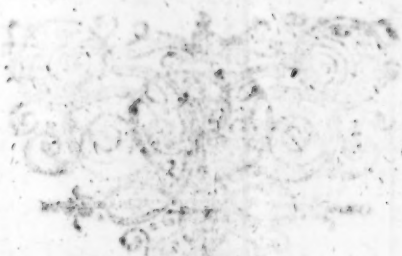
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RESOLUTION

OF A SEASONABLE

Case of Conscience

BEING PART OF A LETTER TO
A PERSON OF QUALITY
BY A SON OF THE CHURCH OF
ENGLAND.



OXFORD
Printed by W. HALL for J. GODWIN.
And D. M. D. D.

Whether a man is bound for every
 thing he doth to bring his expresse
 warrant from Scripture? Neg.

S I R.

ALTHOUGH I durst not meet
 your *commands* (which carry
 such absolutenesse over me)
 with a *refusal*, yet I have re-
 turned your *Queree* with a
resolution; much of which I
 cannot (without a blush) call *my owne*, as being not
 much more then a *Collector* of it, from the judicious
 writings of others; onely I may very justly feare, that
 that *brevity* I am confin'd unto, may take off much
 of that *vigour* and *nervous* modesty their periods
 laye claime unto.

Hookers
 Eccles. Pol.
 Dr. Sanders.

I do

Cart-
wright,
&c.

I do easily believe that your *parts* are pest' red as well as *ours*, with those extravagancies which are bred from the *misapprehension* of this Principle; That every *action* is unlawful which is not expressly commanded from *Scripture*. Which as it hath been formerly made use of, by those of the more *rigid* size, against the *decencies* & *constitutions* of the *Church*; so it is of late driven so high, as that a *respectfull civility* is esteemed a piece of *Idolatry*, and the most *innocent ceremonies*, the most *indifferēt* trivial actions, are persecuted as *inconsistencies* with the *Purity* of *Religion*, unless they carry a *scriptū est* in their forehead.

So that seeming to *inlarge Scripture*, they ignorantly *confine* it, and whilst they would *honour* it, It may be feared they do both to it and others, many palpable injuries.

As the wildest *heresies* and *errors*, have in them a mixture of some *inferiour petty truths*, which may render them more *taking* and *Passable* to others; so they borrow commonly their *Rise*, either from the *misapprehensions* or wrong *application* of truths of a greater *magnitude* & *eminence*. Whilst the truer

Pro-

Protestant justly asserts the perfection & sufficiency of the *sacred Scriptures*, in the *Revelation* of divinely inspired truths, and *substantials* of Gods worship; & in a happier advancement of *morall* and *civil* duties to a more *sublime* and *spirituall* height, by directing them to a *nobler end*: whilst *He* justly maintaines this, without intentions of excluding the *believe* of what is *otherwise* reasonable; or the *practice* of what is *Prudentiall*.

He finds some on one hand fighting for the *absolute* necessity of *Humane* traditions, and others in *shoales* stumbling on the other extreame, who esteem the most *indifferent* actions *unlawfull*, unlesse warranted by an *expresse* *Scriptuall* command or example: and this of late, is driven to so *wild* and *Phantastick* an height; as that *common civility* is lookt upon, as the mark of the *beast*: The *Pulling off* of the *hat* is met with a *what command* have you for that? A *seemly* *reverence* to *superiours* is without doubt a *worshipping* of *Antichrist*, and that *customary* decent *humanity*, which *reason* commands, is spit at, as inconsistent, with the *clownish* principles of their *divinity*.

Thus

Thus an unhappy *misunderstanding*, of that *grand eminent truth*, of *Scriptures sufficiency*, is that stone which too many causelessly, fall upon, and that, with a resolution of *Persecuting* any that shall lift them up ; and from the corruption chiefly of this (amongst other) *mistaken Principles*. Those swarms of *melancholy locusts* which *darken* the aire, and those *creeping Caterpillars* that *destroy* what they finde, do take their unhappy being and *Growth*.

*The state
of the case.*

The question propos'd, doth not concerne the *substantials* of *Gods service*, or the *exercise* of *spiritual graces*. For all those who ambition the title of *Orthodox*, acknowledge the *Holy writ* to be a most *absolute* and *intire direction* for that; excluding all those *humane traditions*, which would be *obtruded*, as *supplements* to the *Doctrine of faith*.

But the case looks only upon *things*, in their *owne nature indifferent*; oft reflecting upon the more *common* and *ordinary actions* of life. Whether in such *actions of indifferency*, *reason* and *discretion*, may be a *sufficient guide* and *warrant* for our *actions* ? or whether we are oblig'd under the *penalty of sin*, to *produce*

due our commission for such an Act, from the command, or example of Scripture, or in default of such a warrant, utterly to forbear.

Towards the resolution of this case in the negative, you may be pleased to consider.

First, That the holy Scriptures are designed for the same use to us now, as those visions and revelations were in the infancy of the World, before Scripture was written; wherewith the blessed Patriarchs, and Prophets, were extraordinarily visited: The end of both being an information, of what was to be believed and done for his more acceptable service, and their happy attainment of salvation.

As it is therefore, a piece of strange phancy to imagine, that those blessed Prophets expected an Immediate Revelation, every time their craving necessities invited them to eat, or their recreation to walke, &c. or that they put a stop upon such common actions of life, unless warranted thereto, (the Law of nature and the light of reason being (without controversy) the guide, which ruled them on such occasions) So is it no lesse extravagant, to gape after

after a like commission, for the like actions now ; or to expect a peculiar command for the use of things indifferent, from Heaven ; but as reason and discretion was their guide in those trivials then, so in such cases it may very well be ours too.

2. For though Sacred Scripture be of a most absolute sufficiency, yet it doth not quite shut reason out of doores ; (that relique of a Diviner image) discretion is not bestowed to be rejected ; God never infuses a power which hath not its use ; though we must captivate our reason to the unfathomable mysteries of Religion ; yet we must not banish it ; though it be not admitted into the holy of holies, yet [we may charitably permit it to be a proselyte of the gate ; It is ill putting out our eyes that we may see better, or wholly to strip our selves of reason, to become thereby more knowing : that greater luminary of his word, doth not extinguish reason ; nor doth that sublimer ray, make us lesse men then we were before : our ratiōative faculty is not discharg'd of its duty, of severing truth from falsehood, good from evil, thereby imbracing the one and rejecting the other.

3. Nor

3. Nor doth this admission of *reason* and *discretion*, to act in a *submissive subordination*, derogate any whit from the *perfection* and *fulnesse*, which the *written word* claimies. For

Every thing is then said to carry a *perfection*, when it wants nothing requisite for that end for which it was framed: as every the most despicable member of man; is sufficiently *perfect*, when it masters that use for which it was appointed; so, every *Period* of *Scripture* wants nothing necessary for that purpose for which it was delivered; yet it follows not that because *Scripture* is *perfect*, therefore it specifies a *direction*, for every *Action* that is *Lawfull*; unlesse it be evinc't, that it was *Gods* intent to comprise therein what ever a man may lawfully practice; and that *God* designed it for that end with an exclusion of any thing else, to be consulted with.

And this once admitted, how would the *Law* of nature stand as a cipher, and that infallible knowledge seem to be antiquated? *Wherein*, both general principles (pointing at humane actions) are comprehended, and from whence flows those conclu-

sions upon which the Particular choice of good and evill, in our common actions of life, takes its being and growth.

4. As for that which they pleade, that wisdom teaches every good way: therefore that whereunto wisdom by Scripture doth not guide, is not good; and so unlawfull.

It may easily appeare, that by thinking to enlarge the use of Scripture, they stretch it too far; tying every action to one Law, when divine bounty hath left us many; and by endeavouring to gaine a wider liberty for wisdom to expatiate it selfe in, they more narrowly confine it.

Though wisdom professeth to teach us every good way, yet shee promises it not by one way of teaching, for as her waies are divers, so her manner of teaching is not meerly the same: as those treasures which Revelation hath discovered in scripture are high and mysterious, so nature it selfe breaths nothing but the effects of wisdom: whatever those seraphicall understandings above, and the Experience and travaile of men below, pretend to be masters of, and

Know

Know, are but so many petty drops of that inexhaustible fountaine of *wisdome*, imparted in a thousand varieties to the world ; If therefore *wisdome* teach us by *Scripture* , not onely all the waies that are in a certain kind, but simply (without any restraint) every way of doing well, then every *Art* may be gain'd from that sacred volum, for every art instructs us, in the way of doing something wel.

Wisdome therefore (as I before mentioned) may teach us every good way, but that not by one onely way of teaching, and the waies of wel-doing are no fewer, then the kinds of voluntary agents.

We must not therefore so admire *wisdome* one way, as to disgrace her in another ; but give every way that just proportionable tribute, which its degree requires.

5. As for that *Queree*, which some patrons of this opinion stick upon, whether any Assurance for what we are to do, and which may resolve us that we do well, may arise from any thing else but *Scripture* : I humbly conceive that assurance may be founded upon somewhat else : incredulous *Thomas* was assured he

did well to *believe* that that *body* which was *raised*, was the *same* which was *crucified*, though it was *his* sense that gave him that *assurance*, because thou hast seen thou *believest* faith our Saviour *Job*. 20. 19.

If we may *believe* an *honest* man upon his *word* in what he affirms, or a Philosophicall axiome (though not contained in *Scripture*) without *derogation* from its *perfection*; why may we not also as well do an *indifferent* thing not forbidden.

For being it is on all hands granted, that *Scripture* is a *perfect* rule of what we are to *believe*, as well as what we are to *do*, in reference to *Heaven*; why may not a man, as well do that which *reason* alone judges *Lawfull* and expedient, without an *expresse* from *Scripture* (if not contrary thereunto,) as believe that which *reason* alone may rightly judge to be *true*, though not mentioned in *Scripture*.

Obj. 6. Whereas some would more moderately usher in a mitigation of this opinion, by pleading that every the most *indifferent* action ought to be *squared* according to those generall rules of the *Law* of *nature*, dispersedly contained in *Scripture*; (As that

we should do, as don by; act nothing against conscience, &c.) and from thence would inferre, that whatever is not positively countenanc't by Scripture is unlawfull.

Be pleased to consider 1. That those generall rules being but occasionally mentioned in Scripture, do rather cleer unto us a former, then lay on us a new obligation; and were in themselves of force and vigour, before those places were written, wherein they are exprest; for they originally oblige us because they are righteous, not because they are written: for had not those generall Rules of nature been exprest any where in Scripture, yet an Action conformable to them, might not (as such) be utterly condemned as sinfull, though it were not able to quote Scripture for its warrant; or though it was not possesst at that present, with an actuall reflexion upon any such place. For then it would follow, That for a man to doe, as he would be don by, would have been a sin, before that Rules inserting in Scripture; (for before it was written it could not be produced as a commission out of Scripture) and consequently an action squared ac-

Ans.

according to it would have been *unjustifiable*, as being destitute of a *Scripturall* command; which is *strange* to be maintained.

7. I should *swel* far beyond the *limits* of a letter, should I but obviously take notice of those *niceties* this opinion *shrouds* it selfe under; I shall therefore onely strike at that *maine Prop* which it builds upon, as its steadiest Pillar, and which upon all occasions is in their mouths, and that is the words of the *Apostle*. Rom. 14. 13. *Whatsoever is not of faith is Sin*; from whence they collect, *That being faith is Bottom'd onely upon Scripture*, and being that an *Action* not grounded on Gods word cannot be of faith; therefore it is sin.

Object.

Ans.

Ans. Were faith in that text taken (as they imagine it) for that *Doctrine*, or *believe* of *divine revelation*, their collection would be (I conceive) *undeniable*; but the whole current of the *context*, and of the most *eminent Heads* and *Expositors*, assures us; that S. Paul by faith there meanes onely a *full persuasion* of the *lawfulness* of what we do; and this is so evinc't by many of high learning and esteem, as
that

that I shall not trouble either you , or my selfe with cleering *that*, which is so convincingly don by others to whom I make bold to refer you.

Every Action then that carries an *assurance* of Lawfulnessse , is in *this sence* an *Action of Faith*, and consequently whatever is done contrary to our persuasion, judgment, or doubtingly, before a sufficient information (though in its own nature lawfull however) is not of *faith* ; and so a *Sin*.

And here Sir had I time , two *Corrolary case*^s of conscience would seasonably interpose themselves for satisfaction.

First , *What power persuasion hath to make that unlawful, which in it's self is not so?*

2^{ly}. *Whether an actual particular disquisition of the lawfulnessse , or expediency of an action, is of such a necessity, as that without it we sin in acting?*

As to the first (for I shall but take a glance as I passe by) although no outward respect , or the most zealous persuasion can change the Nature and essence of things, (their qualities and degrees not depending upon a bare opinion , (for both the dis-

ference

ference and degrees of good and evil , spring from intrinsic conditions, which no outward respect can vary,) yet Mans conscience (by virtue of an unchangeable Law of God) may make that which is essentially good, for to become accidentally evil: that which is innocent in it's nature , may have a sting in it's use, and though nothing be unclean in itself , yet it may become so , to him that accounts it so, and he that makes use of it against his Judgment ; may sulley himself, but never be able to instamper a real impurity upon the Creature. Thus though that which is essentially evil, cannot become accidentally good , yet that which is good in its self may by persuasion , become unlawful to us.

As to the second (which being so pertinent and seasonable a quest I cannot dismisse without a short salute) Whether a particular actual disquisition of the lawfulness and expediency in an action , is of such a necessity as that without it we sin in acting? It may easily be granted, that although in matters of concernement, and where there is an apparent rational cause of doubting, there the lawfulness and expediency
do

do necessarily challenge the diligence of an examination. Yet in matters of indifferency whose use is determined by lawfull authority, and in trivial inconsiderable actions (about which much of our discourse lies) wherein *doing* or *not doing* is indifferent, and wherein *no doubt* can colourably shew it self to our *disquiet*, in such, our *actual inquisitive thoughts*, are so far from being requisite, as they will prove a Burden.

For, if for the *cropping of a flower*, the *calling of one by his name*, or the *vayling of a Bonnet*, &c. or in any such trifles, we should *howerly oblige* our selves to a serious strict inquiry of its *lawfulness* and *expediency*, we should be most ridiculously *inlav'd* to a *servility*, which the *sourest taskemaster* never dreamt of: And how great a pitty is it, that those pretious minutes which call for a more noble employment, should be needlessly throwne away, on such *vaine, petty inquiries*.

A knowledge therefore that is *habitual*, of the true nature and use of *indifferencies*, is sufficient to warrant such *common actions* (where no rational doubt

doubt can *disturbe* our *perswasion*) to be of faith , though we do not *solicitously* torture our selves in an *examining* the *actual* *particular* *consideration* thereof. Sir , I may very wel fear I have tired you , I shall onely therefore summe up some of *those* *sad* *effects* which have received their *being* from *this* *in-*
digested *opinion* ; which upon its first reception (ma-
 ny years since by *strict* men,) did not seem to carry
 so dangerous a sting behind it , by those that enter-
 Hook. eccl. tained it : though *some* were too true Prophets of
 those *miseries* it hath since in volv'd us in : and
 here I heartily wish , that *experience* could not pro-
 duce daily in too large *bleeding* *characters* , those
pernicious *effects* , which the corruption of *this*
principle hath so plentifully hatcht up.

For first , How are poor ignorant heads fill'd by
 it with *whimsies* and *superstitious* *phanties* , casting
 dirt and *impurity* on that , which in its *owne* *nature*
 is *cleanly* and *undefiled* ? railingy scoffing at that as
Antichristian , which hath no venom in it selfe , and
 condemning *clownishly* *civility* , for fear of being *super-*
stitious : little minding that he which condemnes
 that

that as *unlawful*, which is *indifferent*, do's unawares blindly run upon that *superstition*, which he would so cautiously avoyd : For, the taking away of the *indifferency*, of a thing that is so, either by requiring it as necessary, or prohibiting of it as *unlawfull*, is equally *superstitious*.

2. From this bitter roote springs up that censorious judging of others, to such an height, as they end commonly in scorne and contention, which do's not usually end without mischief, for that opposition which lies founded in Religion is most *unnatural* and *furious*; nothing strikes with so deadly a blow as a *thunderbolt* which comes from above; and that *contrariety* which receives its growth from pretences of the *highest nature*, will grow desperate and furious : He that thinks he hath a commission from Heaven for his actions, will prosecute to the purpose; and if once *active burning spleens* be set on fire by an *ignorant zeal*, we may quickly expect all to be in flames, for how can mans unruly passions moderate and still their resentments? when Religion which should give them the check, addes fuel to the greatest disorders.

3. By

3. By a close adherence unto *this principle*, what *obstructions* may be cast upon the *commands of authority*, and what *contempt* upon those relations whom nature subjects us to ? Those actions which require *Secrecy* and *expedition*, must wait at *leisure* upon their *slower* deliberation, and their *equity* must be *longer* a discussing, then the *act* perhaps a *performing* ; every *period* may meet with a *why*, and *what command* have you for that ? And after all, unless a *peremptory authority* from *Scripture* gives their *unsettled Spirits* a *commission*, they utterly *reject* any other, which may *command* their *service*.

4. Lastly how miserably doth *this opinion* betray the *tender consciences* of a *weake Judgment*, to those *languishing uncertainties*, which may render his *whole life* *comfortlesse* and *bitter*, those *daily occasions* which by following his *discretion* may *happily* be gon through with, do meet with *rubbes*, which do both *stop* and *turne* aside their *course*, never reaching a *comfortable home* ; every *common action* of *life* proves a *perplexity* (as not daring to *peepe out* without

without a text of Scripture goes before,) and the most *Innocent action* is wholly made a *scruple*, untill a more able *text-man* wrests a *Scripture* for its *Approbation*. And how must our defected resolution, lie groveling upon the ground, in a *suspense*, untill an *expresse command* takes it up? A doctrine which is truly *Evangelical* fills with joy, not enslaves to bondage, it poures Oyle not *Vinager* into our wounds, whereas this opinion followd to an height, may set us upon a torment, to which a rack may be *easy*, may make us *unserviceable* to our relations, *unwelcome* to our friends, and enemies to our owne repose.

He therefore that would not be *distracted* with perplexities, or *tortured* with *needlese niceties* at home, be *unprofitable* and *clownishly indiscreet* abroad, or troublesome to the Church; will heartily labour after, a *rightly informed judgment* in matters of *indifferency*.

Whilst others therefore, for every *trifle*, and every *act of civility*, for every *decency* in the Church, Cry *where is it commanded in Scripture?* I shall onely argue

argue , *where is it forbidden either directly , or by true full consequence from Scripture , or by reasons for I conceive : That for the use of that which is in its owne nature indifferent , there is sufficient warrant, if it be not forbidden.*

I should now Sir look about for an Apology for so large a returne , but that I write to your self, of whose goodnesse I have had so fair an experience. It is now hoped , that that *fourness* which both our *worship* and *civilities* have been wrapt in, will quickly wear off , and that fatal itch of *novelty* may expire , which bred such *confession* both in *Church* and *State*; in both of which, that all may serve God in the unity of the Spirit , and bond of peace, is the prayers of

S I R

Your most obliged Servant

Oxon. Jes. Col.

1640.

JOHN PARRY.



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FINIS.

